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The Role of the Coach Developer in Supporting and Guiding Coach Learning

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical discussion on the role of the coach developer. The discussion is framed within the context of the roles coach developers play within coach education and sport in the UK. We conclude with some reflective questions designed to promote discussion and debate on how to optimize the central role of the coach developer in shaping quality coach education and ongoing coach development.

The Role of the Coach Developer in Supporting and Guiding Coach Learning

In a bid to professionalise the industry of coaching the last twenty years has seen a substantial increase in the attention paid to the education and training of coaches. Coach education is considered to be a key driver for raising coaching standards and making coaching a ‘bona-fide’ profession (Lyle, 2007). The United Kingdom (UK) government has invested heavily in the review and development of coach education programs (MORI, 2004). National Governing Bodies (NGB), Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and Coach Education Providers (CEPs) have played and will continue to play a crucial role in the design, development and delivery of coach education programs from beginner coach to master coach, however, “there remains a paucity of research addressing the development of coach education curricula, coach learning and how it is to be facilitated and assessed” (Cassidy, Potrac, & McKenzie 2006, p.146). In the absence of this research the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE 2014) advocates a blended approach to learning, mixing formal and informal learning opportunities, integrating significant work-based opportunities and challenging coaches “to enhance their abilities through a range of methodologies from directed, instruction-based approaches to more facilitative collaborative means of learning, which includes interaction with other coaches” (ICCE, 2012, p.37). The relatively recent role of the coach developer is integral to this learning process.

The coach developer is an all-embracing term recently highlighted by the ICCE in their new publication, International Coach Developer Framework, version 1.1 (2014). It has been presented as a good practice guide to help countries, sports organizations, international federations and educational institutions establish effective systems to identify, train, support and nurture those responsible for the education and development of sports coaches at all levels and in all contexts.

According to this global publication coach developers have a variety of roles including 1) Leader, 2) Facilitator, 3) Mentor, 4) Assessor, and 5) Course Designer and Evaluator. Coach developers are not necessarily subject experts but do have skills in developing, supporting and challenging coaches to embrace long-term learning and development. The coach developer needs to be an integral part of any organisation's coaching system and a central proponent of the coaching strategy.

Coaches often have limited input into the design and delivery of coach education yet could offer meaningful insight into how best to structure and offer coach learning (Nash & Sproule, 2012). Coaches have urged coach developers to provide a range of learning resources and mentoring opportunities (Nelson et al, 2013), which supports the stance of the ICCE's coach learning principles. The behaviors, knowledge and practices of coach developers have the potential to leave lasting impressions on the coaches, both good and bad (Nelson & Cushion, 2011). Conceivably the quality of the coach education experience and learning obtained could have a direct correlation with the quality of the coach education workforce.

The role of the coach developer and its significance in the coach education process has gained prominence in the last decade. The purposes of this paper are to:

- explore the roles of the coach developer as members of the coach education workforce providing UK-based examples articulating how this workforce is educated and trained, and
- use the lessons learnt from the UK as catalysts for reflection, organisational development and improving coach developer effectiveness.

The Role of the Coach Developer: A UK Perspective

The UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC) was envisioned to address the issues within coach education identified in the Coaching Task Force Final Report (2002, p.8) as “inconsistent coach education and qualification programmes leading to lack of a recognisable professional framework and poor public recognition of the value of coaches”. The intention behind the UKCC was to create a step change for the UK coach education system by revitalising the education, training and the qualifications system to inform the strategy of professionalizing sports coaching. sports coach UK (scUK) were tasked with designing, developing and implementing the UKCC as a comprehensive UK-wide coach education system. The UKCC is essentially a development framework against which an organisation’s infrastructure (typically a NGB) is endorsed. The infrastructure is that which supports the delivery, assessment, and quality assurance of coaches and coach education programmes and qualifications.

The framework is constructed across four levels from beginner coach to master coach for which the following descriptors are offered:

- Level 1: Assist more qualified coaches, delivering aspects of coaching sessions, normally under direct supervision
- Level 2: Prepare for, deliver and review coaching session(s)
- Level 3: Plan, implement, analyze and revise annual coaching programs
- Level 4: Design, implement and evaluate the process of long term/ specialist coaching programs

The process of endorsement and subsequent documentation ensure a developmental sport-centred approach, enabling sports to develop their provision at a pace appropriate to them and also to develop components of their coach education in line with their identified priorities. Currently 33 sports have obtained UKCC endorsement across the various coaching levels.

Critically, and largely because of this Government-led investment in coach education many NGBs now have an evolved coach development model (CDM) to support the education, training, on-going professional development and deployment of all coaches within their sport. CDMs are offered at different levels, from beginner coach to master coach and are aligned to the player development model (PDM) or player pathway to ensure that appropriately skilled and qualified coaches are deployed in different coaching domains (e.g., participation and performance) and to different cohorts (e.g., children, adolescents, adult participation, talent development, performance and elite athletes), often emphasising different technical specializations. The CDMs constructed by various NGBs have used the research informed CDM created by scUK (2009) as part of the UK Coaching Framework strategy as a reference point for their development work (see Figure 1).

scUK, the pioneers of the CDM and ‘custodians’ of the UKCC Endorsement process, endeavour to ensure that current coach education provision delivers high-quality teaching and learning to all coaches. scUK recommend NGBs should have in place a workforce that:

- is highly skilled, appropriately qualified and committed to CPD
- has a thirst for learning and will drive forward their own development of expertise
- is flexible and able to meet the changing needs of learners
- is excellent at designing, delivering and supporting innovative learning in a variety of physical and technological settings, including educational and in the workplace, and
- reflects the diversity of the sector’s coach workforce.

sports coach UK 2012, p.20

The role of the coach education workforce for the delivery of the UKCC and, in turn the broader CDM, is critical. Depending upon whether the coach education program leads towards an accreditation or qualification the coach education workforce collectively have various responsibilities which include qualification or accreditation development, learning

program design, tutoring or facilitation (classroom and practical), assessment, mentoring and internal quality assurance. These roles can either be assumed independently although one member of the coach education workforce may wear many hats, though not necessarily at the same time. The size of the Governing Body and the resources available to support coach education may also influence the demographics of the workforce. In order to contextualise these roles the following clarifications of the role of coach developer are offered:

- *The qualification designer* is responsible for developing the qualification, set at a specific level. This includes the creation of learning outcomes mapped to current National Standards, the design of an appropriate assessment strategy, the identification of key content and the development of application criteria for coaches to gain access to the qualification. The qualifications designer will ensure that there is comprehensive guidance for the assessor (see role definition below) to ensure the evidence is generated in a fair, valid and reliable manner.
- *The learning program designer* is responsible for building the framework that will support the coach's learning journey from induction to the point of achieving the qualification. The design and development of this framework is key, as this is the vehicle through which coaching behaviour can be acquired, shaped and developed. Ideally the framework should provide access to exciting, challenging and innovative learning, development and assessment experiences that build knowledge and skills through practice and critical reflection in and on practice. A high quality-learning program will put the coach at the centre of the process and encourage them to assume responsibility for their own learning and development. The learning program designer will ensure that there is comprehensive guidance for the tutor (see role definition below) to effectively deliver the programme and for the assessor to assess the

qualification. Ironically this role is not taught overtly in the UK, yet perhaps is one of the most critical for the learning experiences of coaches.

- *The facilitator* as known by the ICCE or the *tutor* as widely referred to in the UK is responsible for leading and supporting learning in both classroom and practical environments. Typically they would facilitate more practical than classroom based learning at Levels 1 and 2 as excessive classroom time at these levels negates the value of teaching theory through practice and opportunities to apply knowledge in a supported practical setting are lost.

- *The assessor* ideally should be recruited from the pool of facilitators because they have familiarity with the learning program in terms of outcome and content. Assessors are responsible for undertaking both formative and summative assessment using a range of assessment tools and methods to assess both knowledge and coaching practice. At levels 1 and 2 coaching practice is typically assessed through observation of coaches working with peer coaches in a simulated environment. At the higher levels where the number of coaches accessing the qualification is smaller and logistically and financially more manageable, much observed assessment of coaching practice is conducted in the field in the coach's own environment. Historically the assessor's role was purely the assessment of competence, however, in recent years there has been a shift to adopt alongside this a more developmental approach that nurtures the individual coach's skills and effectiveness as well as making and sharing decisions about their skills, knowledge and competence. UKCC endorsed qualifications are vocational in nature and there is an overt requirement that coaching competence is assessed practically.
- The *mentor* assumes responsibility for supporting the application of coach learning beyond the taught course out in the coach's own work-based environment. The

UKCC endorsement criteria require that supported coaching practice, always separate from the taught course is integrated into the learning programme and coaches provide evidence of this. Significant personal learning can occur spontaneously on the field, track, court, or poolside because the learning is situated within the coaching environment, referred to in Figure 1 as the informal learning environment. Coaches can learn through on-going interactions, observation, listening, their own practice, co-coaching and through reflection. Learning is applicable to any coach who is motivated, open and receptive to learning from practical experience. The use of a mentor is promoted to support self-directed and work-based learning across all levels and some sports, including Athletics, Cricket and Golf, have formalised this role at Levels 3 and 4. Formalised mentoring is evidenced through the recruitment and deployment of mentors allocated to support coaches. Typically this relationship occurs remotely through electronic mediums and in the field with mentors tasked to support learning and undertake assessment functions. The specific nature of each role varies by sport.

- *The Internal Quality Assurer (IQA)* is the individual who inspects the delivery mechanisms and assessment processes to ensure these are operated consistently and fairly in a standardized manner across all of the programs and qualifications. Quality assurance is vital to ensure that coach education providers are consistently offering a high quality service in terms of the delivery and assessment of coach education programs regardless of where and by whom these are being conducted.

Many awarding organisations, such as 1st4sport Qualifications, an example of an awarding body that offers access to a range of UKCC endorsed coaching qualifications, stipulate that the coach education workforce is appropriately qualified. Many UK sports have engaged in a wider education agenda than just coaching and have subsequently formed partnerships with Awarding Organisations to provide access to the coach workforce

qualifications. The 1st4sport Education and Training Suite is a complete set of professional qualifications that can be used to qualify individuals to tutor, assess, internally quality-assure or mentor in total confidence (See Figure 2).

In order to achieve the different qualifications aspirant coach developers must apply for and undertake a program of study. The successful completion of the program leads towards the achievement of a professional qualification, (See Figure 2 for examples) which gives the tutor, assessor, IQA and mentor a license to practice within the NGB's coach education team.

The evidence gathering process and on-going assessment is critical and the coach developers are assessed on their knowledge and critically their competence in a real as opposed to a simulated work-based environment acting as tutors, assessors, mentors and IQAs. This was not always the case as previous iterations of the qualification, specifically the tutor and assessor qualifications enabled learners to be assessed working with their peers acting as compliant learner-coaches in a simulated environment. This did not allow an authentic portrayal of their skills and expertise and was deemed insufficient in terms of a robust evidence base; as such the evidence requirements have changed challenging learners to generate evidence from an actual learning perspective.

Coaches accessing initial training and qualifications associate with the coach developers who operate at the front face of the organization's coach education program and typically these are the tutor, assessor and mentor. These roles have a direct interplay with the quality of the coaches' learning, specifically the facilitation and formative assessment functions. How effective the organization is and respective coach developers are in the provision, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of coach education is now under some scrutiny. Given their role as learners at the center of the education process, coaches can

provide valuable participant perception and insight into the effectiveness of an NGB's provision.

Supporting Coach Effectiveness: Lessons Learned from the UK

The development of sporting talent will not be effective if equal research and investment is not made in the development of talented coaches to guide the process. Much less emphasis has been placed on the management of coaches from the recruitment stage to their subsequent development through their career. Experienced, knowledgeable and educated coaches need to be developed to meet the needs of all individuals in sport at all ages and stages. If the joint aims of lifelong sport and competitive success are to be realised then more attention has to be focused on the long term education and development of coaches at all ages and stages.

UK Governing Body coach education has undergone significant change over the last 15 years, the primary trigger being the advent of the UKCC. Potentially the most significant catalyst for change has been driven by the need for a learner or coach-centred approach, which essentially shifts the role of the educator from deliverers of information to facilitators of coach learning. Historically coach educators focused on delivery, adopting a top down approach and not on what the students were learning. This emphasis can disable learners by creating passivity and an unwillingness to take responsibility for their own learning. By contrast learner-centered teaching ensures learners are actively engaged in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking (Armstrong, 2010) and this approach is being promoted for coach developers.

In order to design, deliver and assess coach learning in a coach-centered manner the coach learning principles advocated by the 1CCE (2012), mentioned earlier in this article, come into the fore. A coach-centred approach will adopt a blended learning approach that enables the coach to achieve the learning outcomes and generate evidence to meet assessment

requirements of the qualification. scUK (2009) suggest a well-designed coach-centred learning program has a number of key features (See Figure 3).

The change experienced by UK Governing Bodies, especially from the alignment of their provision with current best practice in learner-centred education, has generated considerable useful information. This learning may be best presented as a series of statements and reflective questions that the organization or coach developer should seek to answer. The questions proposed in the next section follow the key features of Figure 3 and offer some opportunities for critical reflection and development before a commitment to action.

Pre-course

Typically there are requirements that coaches need to have/ meet in order to be accepted into specific qualifications.

- *Are there any pre-requisites?*
- *Is there a minimum age requirement?*
- *Does the coach need any level of technical competence/ expertise to undertake the qualifications at the various levels?*

Coach Induction

A well-designed coach induction will ensure coaches are ready to undertake and complete the qualification. The focus of the induction is determined by what the coach needs to know and do before the start of the coach education program. Trudel, Culver and Werthner (2013) discuss the importance of coaches creating their own internal learning situations stressing the ‘leading the horse to water’ analogy for coach developers. In other words it does not matter how well coach developers set up and manage the environment the emphasis remains on the learners to learn.

- *Do coaches need to know where the qualifications fit within the coach development pathway?*

- *Do they need to know the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment/evidence requirements at this stage?*
- *Are there any useful learning activities that coaches can engage in before they start the course; some pre-course reading, tasks, activities, self-reflection or profiling that could be done?*
- *What role should the coach developer play at this stage? Is there an option to start the coach developer-coach relationship at this stage? What impact might that have on coach learning long-term?*

Workshop Delivery

Workshop delivery has a ‘half-life’ (Booth, 2005) that is the time taken for the effectiveness of delivery to reduce to half its original impact. In coach education this is the time taken after the face-to-face learning, for half the energy, enthusiasm and drive to fade. The longer people are involved and engaged in their learning and development, the more powerful and long lasting the learning.

When designing learning programs there are a number of things that can positively impact the half-life of training, for example, time lags between each taught element allow the learning to embed. Mallett, Rynne and Dickens (2013) refer to coaching environments as breeding grounds for coach learning assuming they are constructed to enable coaches to take the learning from them.

- *What is the optimum time that should be built in between learning modules? Coaches are real people with real lives and other commitments.*
- *How flexible is the delivery of the learning programme model? Can the model only be delivered in a certain format over a certain period of time?*
- *What other delivery models could be considered?*

During the face-to-face phase, facilitation is preferred to presentation, lecturing and

instruction, although it is acknowledged there may be some 'directing' of knowledge in order for new learning to mature. The provision of active learning experiences such as discussion, tasks, simulations, role-play and coaching practice are vital to make sense of and contextualise new learning. Guided discovery and problem-solving are tools that can be used to support critical or creative thinking. Coaches must be given the opportunity to think and act like coaches for as much of the learning time as possible. So consider the following reflective questions:

- *During micro-coaching practice sessions are coach developers reminded to encourage coaches to 'act as players, think like coaches?'*
- *In managing the group review after any practice how are coach developers drawing out and sharing the learning to ensure it is meaningful for all as opposed to just the coach in question?*

Coach-centred learning emphasises reflection in and on action and empowers the coach to think critically. The coach developer is key to the delivery of a high quality coach-centred experience.

Resources

Resources are designed for two specific audiences; coaches and coach developers. Coach resources should be designed to complement on-course learning and signposting should be highlighted from the taught element to the resources that underpin and provide additional information on or assess that specific piece of learning.

- *What resources are provided to support coach learning and coach assessment?*
- *Does the coach learning manual provide opportunities for coaches to engage in their own learning (tasks activities); bring learning to life (applied practice scenarios) and provide opportunities for self-reflection (reflection notes, personal development plans)?*

- *How well do they cater for all learning preferences?*
- *Are resources available in a range of formats? If they are electronic, how are they made available or signposted to? If they are required to be referred to on course are coaches encouraged to use laptops, tablets or smart phones to access and record new learning? Will they need wi-fi access?*
- *Are assessment task instructions offered in coach friendly language? How are they cross-referenced to and from the taught programme?*
- *Can coaches engage with assessment materials and use them as coaching tools to support planning, delivery on court/ track/ pitch side and reflection?*

Self-directed Study

Self-directed study is integrated to complement the taught programme, provide opportunities for wider engagement, further practice and reflection to consolidate learning. It could consist of a combination of wider reading, reviewing footage and coach planning, observed practice and reflection. Cassidy, Potrac and McKenzie (2006) highlight the importance of the reflective process and emphasise the facilitation approach to develop Communities of Practice (CoP) that encourage discussion, debate and sharing as more meaningful learning interventions than instructor-led approaches.

- *How does the self-directed learning link with on-course learning?*
- *How is existing coach learning integrated into the taught course?*
- *Are there course expectations aside from the taught course?*
- *How are coaches informed about the self-directed element?*

Coaches who have full time commitments will need a sense of how much time they need to complete these tasks.

Supported Practice in the Field

Coaches need to understand what they are expected to do, by when and whether this is assessed or not. Callary, Culver, Werthner and Bales (2014) reinforce the use of experiential learning and critical reflection, which provides support for the inclusion of supported practice in the field and vindicates the need for a mentor within the program. This will help coaches to answer questions such as:

- *Do coaches know what support is offered across the whole programme from induction to accreditation?*
- *Is there an evolved support network in place? Is this formally organised or more ad-hoc and reactive?*

Evidence Gathering, On-going Assessment and Final Assessment

The assessment criteria and evidence requirements are determined by the specific qualification undertaken. Assessment of coaching qualifications evaluates both coach knowledge and performance.

- *Is there an assessment strategy in place? Is it possible to assess across a number of learning outcomes/ assessment criteria at any one time and so rationalise the amount of assessment experiences?*

A number of assessment tools and methods can be developed to assess knowledge and performance including a practical coaching log book, written paper (multiple-choice questionnaire or short answer questions), practical observation and professional discussion.

- *When, where and how is assessment integrated within and across the learning programme?*

The timing is critical and the key learning must have been undertaken before the assessment is conducted and evidence gathered.

- *Equally if assessments are conducted on course, such as practical coaching observations, has sufficient time been given to ensure there is reflection time built in*

to accompany the observed coaching session?

- *If a professional discussion with each coach is a requirement of the assessment and being used for developmental purposes, is this integrated within the program timings?*

Coaches are usually made aware of the assessment and evidence requirements during the induction phase and this is reinforced again on course at salient points. The assessment pack is the key resource that underpins this element of the program and coaches need to be able to use this independently. Typically on a busy assessment day all assessors look for is whether the right type/ amount of evidence has been provided; not how well it meets the task requirements. There are logistical implications associated with pre-submission that would have to be considered and built into the assessment process.

Summary

The context of coach education and coach development has undergone significant change in the UK over the last 20 years. The intention behind this change was to revitalise the coach education system by streamlining the education, training and the qualifications system to inform the strategy of professionalizing sports coaching. Part-funded by the UK Government and driven by the requirements of the UKCC, there is now a coaching framework in place, which acts as a reference point and benchmarking tool to ensure consistency across all sports.

NGBs have driven considerable change in how they design, deliver, assess and quality assure coach learning. Perhaps the biggest change is in how the coach education programs are delivered, emphasising facilitation putting the coach at the centre of learning process. If the joint aims of lifelong sport and competitive success are to be realised then more attention has to be focused on the long-term education and development of coaches. Therefore an increasing emphasis on the role of the coach developer is now critical to ensure the quality of coach education and in turn coaching practice.

The coach education workforce (the coach developers) collectively have various key responsibilities which include qualification or accreditation development, learning program design, tutoring or facilitation (classroom and practical), assessment, mentoring and internal quality assurance. However, coaches do not always perceive the value and quality of the coach developers and given their role as learners at the center of the education process, coaches can provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of an NGB's provision. The most effective mechanisms for educating and supporting coaches are still being contested (Nash, 2014).

Within the UK lessons have been learned during this long and expensive process of restructuring coach education and one of the key findings is the need for a strong coach developer workforce. The outcomes of this process and subsequent questions posed in this paper are designed to inform and assist others in cultivating quality coach developers. The design and delivery of coach centred learning programs is now underpinned by a process that includes the formal training of coach developers. For coach developers who have accessed initial training and qualifications and critically have had the opportunity to apply these skills, forward-thinking organisations are now looking at how they can best support the growth of coach developer skills sets from competent to excellent.

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Figure 1: The 4-by-4 Coach Development Model

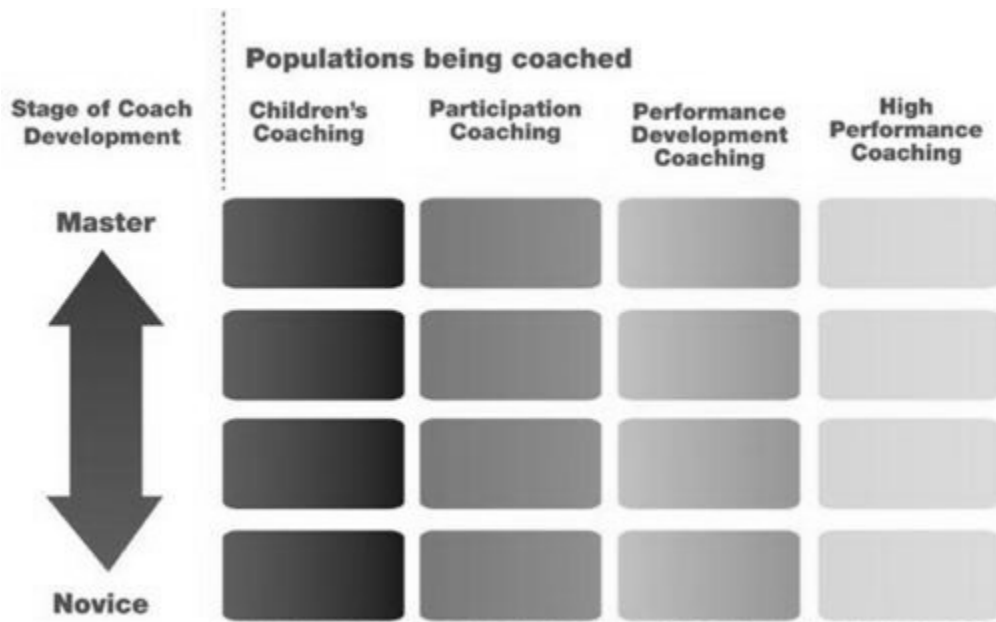


Figure 2: 1st4sport Qualifications Education and Training Suite

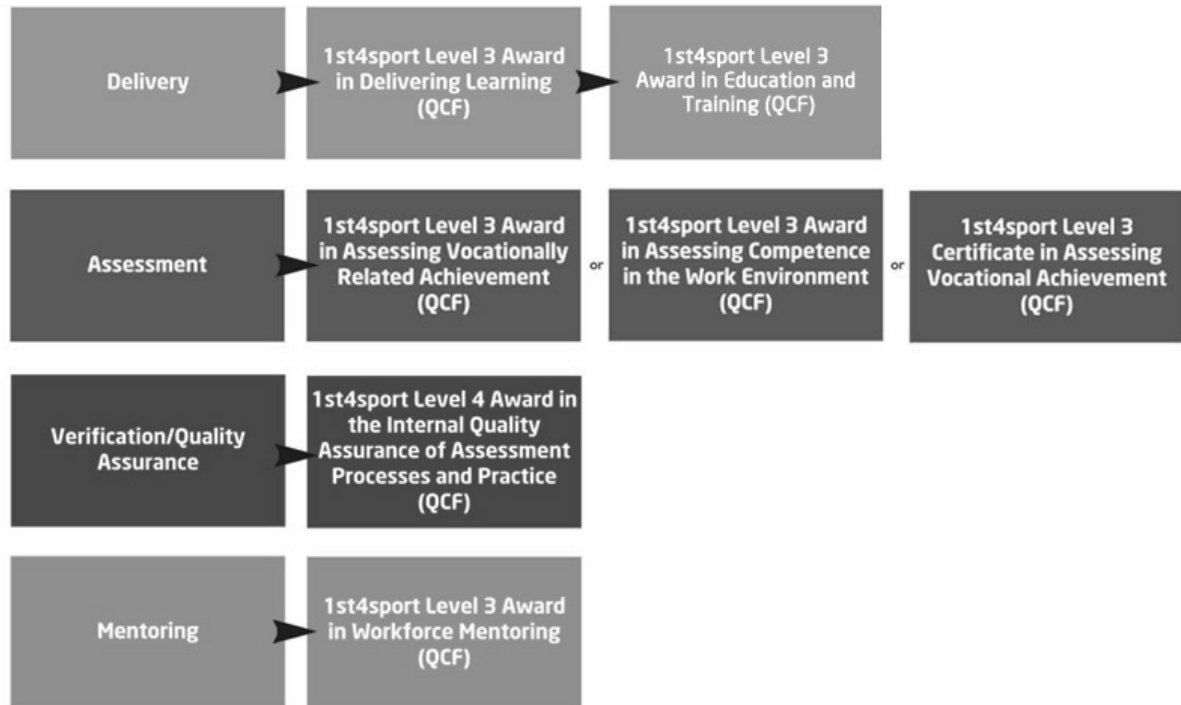


Figure 3: – Key Features of a High Quality Coach-Centred Programme

